

## Welford - February 2019

This Sunday morning turned out to be sunny and, with temperatures expected to reach 14 degrees by mid-day, the weather was going to be kind for our February morning walk.

Our walk was from the Wharf Inn in Welford, a town in the north of the county. Known originally as 'Wellesford' in the time before the Domesday book, it did have three streets running parallel. What is now West Street, with a Church and Manor house, was probably the Main Street. In 1610, what is now the Welford Road was called the London Way, being an important staging post for coaches traveling from Leicester to London. To service this traffic there were seven Inns located along the present High Street.



Sadly, the Wharf Inn is the only one remaining. It is a castellated building, originally called the George Hotel, and is still the retreat of the present boating fraternity. Welford and Sulby Reservoirs, across the road from the Wharf Inn, were dug to feed the Welford canal and subsequently the Grand Union Canal around 1815. During its construction its banks burst and flooded the whole of the Stanford area resulting in a number of drownings.

There never was much boating traffic on the canal and by 1870 was more or less choked up with weed and virtually un-navigable. Restored by the British Waterways Board in 1969 it is now turned over to leisure traffic terminating in the Marina.



After the usual preliminaries and food orders taken, the group of 19 left in the direction of the town via a small pocket park. Snowdrops were evident everywhere as we wound our way over a small wooden bridge. Exiting this park we took a right turn past an ancient wooden carving of Postman Pat and his black and white cat (Jess) along a concrete road up to a gate into two fields frequented by six friendly horses.



Skirting the muddy wallow, they had made in the centre of the field, a downhill stretch took us by ancient fish ponds to the only stile we would encounter on this walk. Turning uphill on a concrete farm track a startled Muntjac deer scurried away across the field to our left.

At the crest of the rise we continued onto a muddy track away from the road across fields which gave us distant views of Stanford Reservoir in the far distant mists. Two church spires could be seen as we walked, one for North Kilworth and the other South Kilworth. Descending downward to the Grand Union Canal a short rest was taken on the packhorse bridge to allow stragglers to catch up.



Turning under the bridge, the towpath was followed for half a mile past two bridges where we left the canal. Whilst taking a stop for refreshments a single narrow boat called the Artful Dodger passed beneath our bridge giving us a friendly wave. Taking an almost hidden path through some bushes our return journey began. Climbing two quite steep hills brought us back in sight of Welford. A farm gate brought us back onto the concrete road on which we had set out that morning then again over the only stile on the walk.



Crossing the field with horses we retraced our way back to the Wharf Inn. After a short wait in what was now a very busy pub our pre ordered meals arrived for the 13 who had decided to stay.